



Tania Libertad

Thursday, November 17, 2005, 8 pm
Zellerbach Hall

Sonia Cornuchet, *piano and music director*

Felix Casaverde, *guitar*

Jose De Jesus Mendoza, *bass*

Gabriela Garcia, *accordion and guitar*

Juan Carlos Vasquez, *percussion*

Raul Oviedo, *percussion*

Alberto Martinez, *sound engineer*

Tonight's program will be announced from the stage.

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Tania Libertad possesses a voice that ranges effortlessly between velvety, angelic musings and joyous outbursts of searing intensity. Although deeply grounded in the fertile Afro-Peruvian music of her homeland she has done so much to popularize around the world, Tania Libertad is truly a singer “sin banderas” (without borders) — a vocalist to whom any style is an invitation to explore, conquer and redefine on her own terms.

For three decades and through the release of 35 albums, she has enjoyed the unwavering support of her fans while maintaining a consistently high level of critical and popular success. With the release of *Negro Color* (Color Black), her second CD for the World Village label, Tania returns to her roots — the rhythmically delicate and naturally sensuous universe of organic, culturally distinct Afro-Peruvian styles. As always, she does so on her own terms — melding a wide range of African-derived songs from throughout the Americas with carefully selected Afro-Peruvian rhythmic elements to achieve a stunning synthesis of pan-American styles.

Born Tania Libertad de Souza Zuniga in the small town of Zana in northern Peru, of a Portuguese father and a Peruvian mother of indigenous and Spanish descent, Tania admits that African blood doesn't flow through her veins, but the spirit of Peru's small but culturally vibrant Afro-Peruvian community fires her artistic spirit. “I was nurtured in the coastal area, so my contact with Afro-Peruvian music started right at the beginning of my life,” she recalls of growing up in the region Peruvians fondly refer to as “La Costa Negra” — the Black Coast. “I started to sing at the age of five, performing songs in the *vals* (Peruvian waltz) style and boleros — Latin ballads — both accompanied by the *cajon*” (a wood sound chamber that performs the rhythmic function in Afro-Peruvian music that the Cuban conga drum does in styles like rumba and mambo). Having grown up with this unique style, she's become intimately aware of how Afro-Peruvian fare differs from its counterpart in other Latin American countries. There is, Tania points out, a very special kind of dialogue between musicians, singers, and those who dance to the rhythms.

“There are only about 15,000 Afro-Peruvian

families in the country, but their cultural influence is very strong,” she adds. “Not only the music of these coastal people is special; many of their customs are also distinct.”

When she moved to the capital city of Lima as a teenager to pursue a career in music, Tania began to cultivate friendships with a strong community of composers and performers who were deeply involved with Afro-Peruvian music. “At that time,” she recalls of the 1970s, “the nationalistic government encouraged the growth of Peruvian culture, and even established an Afro-Peruvian Ballet company.

“For many years,” Tania explains, “the music was performed mostly out of sight, behind closed doors in close-knit Afro-Peruvian communities. Peruvian high society considered the music profane. But then, about 70 years ago, the rhythms began to emerge, style by style, and eventually grew into the popular form it is today. Now it is widely embraced as a music that's emblematic of the best of Peruvian culture.”

Although she moved to Mexico City in the early 1980s and has lived there since, winning the adoration of a legion of Mexican fans, Tania has never ceased investigating what she considers her most important artistic touchstone, the fertile music tradition she grew up with on Peru's Black Coast.

Her amazingly diverse discography of almost three dozen albums includes forays into the stylistic realms of salsa, *nueva cancion* (protest songs), Brazilian music, her trademark boleros and other genres, the Afro-Peruvian tradition is one she has a long and ongoing relationship with. Early in her career, Tania recorded *Lo Inolvidable de Chabuca Granda*, a tribute to one of the great masters of the Afro-Peruvian style. In 1990, she revisited the idiom, but with a twist on *Africa en America* — an exuberant survey of African-influenced music throughout the hemisphere. Two years ago, she teamed up with Cape Verdean diva Cesaria Evora on a return to Afro-Peruvian basics on her U.S. debut, the critically acclaimed World Village release *Costa Negra* (Black Coast). Now, she delivers what may be her most ambitious effort yet to redefine and extend the popularity of Afro-Peruvian music, the eclectically charming *Negro Color*.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

“I am not a folklorist,” she says without apology. “*Negro Color* is my latest experiment. *Costa Negra* saw the return of an acoustic style. But I don’t like to record an album that sounds like something else I’ve done. All of my albums are different. In *Negro Color*, we didn’t use any samples or synthesizers. Since all the world sings boleros, I decided to do boleros, but with other rhythms, not the standard form. For instance, on the Armando Manzanero song ‘Por debajo de la mesa,’ we used the *lando* rhythm. It’s a beautiful song, and it gains a lot by being performed to the *lando* style.”

“*Negro Color* is a collaboration among my music director, my guitarist, and myself,” Tania explains of the special synthesis of talent that came together to produce this gem of an album. The guitarist, Felix Casaverde, performed with Chabuca Granda in Peru years ago, but came to Mexico with Libertad in 1980. With Cuban-born pianist and music director Sonia Cornuchet, Tania has a special collaborator. “We’re searching,” she says, “for the point that links Cuban and Peruvian music.”

But it is the rhythmically supple Afro-Peruvian sound that dominates *Negro Color*, even when Tania sings the poignant Chico Buarque song “Funeral del Labrador” (Funeral of the Laborer) in Portuguese with Brazilian vocalist Eder da Rosa. “Afro-Peruvian music is more sensual than the African-derived music of other countries,” Tania explains. “Rhythms like *lando* create a very special air — a unique quality — that doesn’t exist in the African styles of Colombia, Central America, Puerto Rico or Cuba.”

Those who listen to *Negro Color* will quickly be drawn into Tania’s ever expanding domain of music that creates the “special air” and “unique quality” few others have been able to define and communicate in such a captivating manner. As the joyous and evocative performances on *Negro Color* attest, Tania Libertad has again confirmed that she is a singer “sin banderas” artistically liberated, supremely confident, and the master of her own music universe.